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Strengthening the Department of Public Information, within the existing capacity, in order to support and enhance the United Nations web site in all official languages of the Organization: status of implementation

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In paragraph 42 of its resolution 58/270 of 23 December 2003, the General Assembly recalled its decision 57/579 of 20 December 2002 and requested the Secretary-General to continue to strengthen the United Nations web site through further redeployment to the required language posts and to report on the status of its implementation to the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. The present report is submitted in compliance with that request.

The Department of Public Information is continuing to make all efforts to implement decision 57/579, being mindful of the need to strike a balance between other mandated activities competing for resources. Progress has been made through the redeployment of 1 P-4, 1 P-2 and 6 General Service posts and other innovative measures. However, with the continuing growth of content of the web site, there are no further opportunities within the current budget of the Department to absorb the costs involved in implementing the proposals put forward in document A/57/355 without adversely affecting implementation of Member States' mandates for other activities.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted in compliance with the request contained in paragraph 42 of General Assembly resolution 58/270 of 23 December 2003, in which the Assembly recalls its decision 57/579 of 20 December 2002 and requests the Secretary-General to continue to strengthen the United Nations web site through further redeployment of resources to the required language posts and to report on the status of its implementation to the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session.

2. In its decision 57/579, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, inter alia, to continue to strengthen the United Nations web site through further redeployment of resources within the Department of Public Information, giving priority to the language posts required and to keep the question of the equality among the six official languages on the web site under review. The Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to proceed with the implementation of the proposals on strengthening the web site contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/57/355). Notably, that report outlined the resources required by the Department for the ongoing development and maintenance of the United Nations web site in all official languages excluding the central infrastructure support needs of the Information Technology Services Division in the Department of Management and those relating to the provision of content in the official languages by the respective content-providing offices.

3. The continued development and enhancement of the United Nations web site in all the official languages of the Organization has been one of the major issues under consideration before the Committee on Information since its twenty-first session in 1999. Accordingly, six separate reports[1] have been submitted to the Committee on Information in which the Department of Public Information presented a variety of options — along with associated resource requirements — for achieving full or partial language parity. In the seventh and latest report (A/58/217), the Department reported on the status of implementation of proposals previously identified to strengthen the language capacity in the United Nations Website Section through redeployment of posts and streamlining the workflow, thereby increasing synergies and reducing compartmentalization.

II. Current capacity of the Department of Public Information

4. The United Nations web site began operations in 1995 as a pilot project through the joint efforts of the Department of Public Information and the Information Technology Services Division of the Department of Management. There being no formal mandate for the web site but as a tool considered vital for the dissemination of information on the work of the Organization, given the ever-increasing impact of the Internet, the Department of Public Information has made exceptional efforts to redeploy existing resources to make the web site operational and ensure its continued enhancement and maintenance.

5. In adopting the programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 in December 2003, the General Assembly approved the redeployment of one P-4 and six General Service posts from the closure of United Nations Information Centres in Western Europe to the News and Media Division to strengthen the multilingual capacity of the United Nations Website Section. Earlier, in 2003, a P-2 post was redeployed to

the Website Section from the Outreach Division of the Department. As a result, the current complement of posts in the Website Section stands at 25 (1 P-5, 3 P-4s, 6 P-3s, 3 P-2s and 12 GS). In addition, in accordance with paragraph 50 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/AC.198/2003/2), pending identification and allocation of further regular posts, the requirements of the Section are accommodated through three General Service (Other level) positions currently on general temporary assistance.

III. Status of implementation

6. Notwithstanding the continuing effort to identify resources necessary to implement fully the proposals outlined in document A/57/355, with the redeployment of the seven posts from the closed United Nations Information Centres in Western Europe, six further posts (4 P-4 and 2 P-3) would be required in the Website Section.

7. Of the seven posts approved for redeployment by the General Assembly during the biennium 2004-2005, the P-4 post has been advertised and recruitment is in the final stage. All of the General Service (Other level) posts were advertised and five have already been filled through the recruitment process. The remaining post, that of the Website Assistant in Chinese, has not been filled owing to the absence of eligible internal candidates. In addition, some of these posts have been filled through promotion within the Section. In the light of paragraph 25 of resolution 58/270, with limited exceptions, the Secretary-General was requested to suspend recruitment action for new vacancies in General Service posts for the biennium 2004-2005. Consequently, the filling of vacated Language Assistant posts will be delayed, as the pool of candidates would be limited.

8. In addition to the redeployment of posts to the Website Section, the Department has continued to look for innovative ways to meet the request of the General Assembly to strengthen the United Nations web site. It has expanded the United Nations News Centre — one of the most visited areas of the web site — into all official languages, undertaken major technological improvements to enhance productivity and facilitate the availability of materials in all official languages and put into place creative arrangements, such as the agreements with universities in Belarus, China and Spain for pro bono translation of information materials.

9. The Department's efforts have seen the number of pages processed for posting in each of the languages rise significantly. On average, each month nearly 500 new pages are posted and 2,800 pages are revised in all languages. Full utilization of all the posts redeployed under the present biennium budget will enable a further increase in the average number of pages posted in languages other than English. Increased postings are helping to fuel significant growth in the number of users of the web sites in other official languages. On an average day, over 940,000 pages are currently being viewed by users, up from 720,000 page-views daily in 2002. Over the past 12 months, substantial increases in the visits to the language sites have been recorded. The chart below depicts the growth experienced by each of the official language web sites over a one-year period, comparing the month of June in 2003 and in 2004. The chart shows the number of unique visitors as well as page-views during the month.

Percentage increases, number of unique visitors[1] and pages viewed by language on the United Nations web site, comparing June 2003 to June 2004

Language	*Month*	*Unique visitors*	*Pages viewed*
Arabic	June 2004	60 590	613 900
	June 2003	50 468	353 266
	% increase	20.06%	73.78%
Chinese	June 2004	124 084	1 182 083
	June 2003	41 760	318 018
	% increase	197.14%	271.70%
English	June 2004	1 921 382	21 209 246
	June 2003	1 781 855	17 659 070
	% increase	7.83%	20.10%
French	June 2004	163 454	1 089 373
	June 2003	152 126	832 116
	% increase	7.45%	30.92%
Russian	June 2004	61 221	658 726
	June 2003	40 751	367 202
	% increase	50.23%	79.39%
Spanish	June 2004	246 044	1 232 877
	June 2003	214 398	969 506
	% increase	14.76%	27.17%
Total United Nations web site	June 2004	2 576 775	25 986 205
	June 2003	2 281 358	20 499 178
	% increase	12.95%	26.77%

[1] When tracking the amount of traffic on a web site, the term "unique visitors" refers to a person who visits a web site more than once within a specified period of time. Software that tracks and counts web site traffic can distinguish between visitors who only visit the site once and unique visitors who return to the site. Different from a site's hits or page views — which are measured by the number of files that are requested from a site — unique visitors are measured according to their unique Internet protocol (IP) addresses, which are like online fingerprints and unique visitors are counted only once no matter how many times they visit the site during a specified time period.

10. In increasing the volume of material in official languages, the Department is facing the challenge of expanded responsibilities and an increase in the workload required to ensure continued maintenance of the web site. For example, the News Centres require constant updating as well as the daily input of news, the translated materials from the universities need to be edited, processed, formatted and converted for posting and the continually expanding database programming needs ongoing monitoring and enhancement. In addition, the Committee on Information has requested the Department to ensure that all new and revised pages adhere to the obligatory level of compliance with recognized industry standards regarding accessibility by persons with disabilities.

11. The Department therefore is faced with trying to close the extensive gap between English and the other official languages in the context of a continuing heavy increase in the volume of material in which English continues to dominate. The combination of these factors places increasing demands on the United Nations web site and the Department's current resource capacity continues to be severely strained. As a result, while progress will continue to be made, present resources are not adequate to sustain a rapid expansion of pages and to meet the full maintenance requirements of the United Nations web site. The Department of Public Information is not able to redeploy further resources without adversely affecting other mandated programmes and activities.

IV. Conclusion

12. **The Department of Public Information is continuing to make all efforts to implement the decision of the General Assembly to strengthen the United Nations web site in all official languages, being mindful of the need to strike a balance between other mandated activities competing for resources. The Department has made progress through redeployment and other innovative methods to expand the volume of material in languages other than English, but faces the challenge of continued expansion of material and an increase in maintenance requirements on the expanding number of language pages. At the same time, the Department is not at present in a position to redeploy more resources to meet this increasing challenge without adversely affecting other mandated programmes and activities.**

Notes

[1] A/AC.198/1999/6; A/AC.198/1999/9 and Corr.1 and 2; A/AC.198/2000/7-A/AC.172/2000/4; A/AC.198/2001/8; A/AC.198/2002/6; and A/57/355.